United Nations

Daily Highlights

Department of Public Information • Central News Section • New York

Prepared by Central News

DH/1514
4 November 1993

THURSDAY HIGHLIGHTS

- Security Council extends withdrawal period of UNTAC military police and medical elements up to 31 December to ensure safety of personnel and equipment leaving Cambodia; extends withdrawal of mine clearance unit to 30 November; establishes military liaison team for six-month period.

- Secretary-General to convene Fourth Coordination Meeting on Humanitarian Assistance for Somalia in Addis Ababa from 29 November to 1 December.

- General Assembly re-elects Sadako Ogata as UNHCR for five-year term as of 1 January 1994.

- Co-Chairman of Yugoslavia peace conference says suspended peace talks on Bosnia and Herzegovina are unlikely to resume while fighting continues; warns of inevitable humanitarian disaster this winter and reports on efforts to improve safety of relief convoys.

- General Committee recommends inclusion in General Assembly's agenda of item on promotion and protection of rights of children who are victims of especially difficult circumstances, including armed conflicts.

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The Security Council today extended the deployment of military police and medical elements of the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) beyond the scheduled withdrawal date of 15 November, on the basis that they would be withdrawn by 31 December. The extension had been recommended by the Secretary-General, in a letter to the Council dated 28 October, in order to ensure the safety of UNTAC personnel and equipment being withdrawn from the country amid deteriorating security conditions. The Council took that action by unanimously adopting resolution 879 (1993), in which it noted that the withdrawal of other UNTAC elements would end on 15 November.

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The Council also extended the period of withdrawal of UNTAC's mine clearance and training unit until 30 November. It noted the need for continuity in the vital work of the Cambodia Mine Action Centre (CMAC) and urged Member States to assist CMAC with technical experts and equipment. In addition, the Council decided to establish a team of 20 military liaison officers for a six-month period to report to the Secretary-General on matters affecting security in Cambodia, to liaise with the Government, and to assist it in dealing with residual military matters relating to the Paris Agreements. It welcomed the Secretary-General's intention to appoint a person to coordinate the United Nations presence in the country, in accordance with the spirit and principles of those Agreements.

Affirming the importance of ensuring respect for international humanitarian law, particularly in view of Cambodia's recent tragic history, the Council welcomed the First Prime Minister's commitment to the implementation of the new Constitution, and endorsed arrangements envisaged by the Secretary-General for appropriate United Nations activities in support of that commitment. It also welcomed the Secretary-General's intention to report on the lessons learned during the course of UNTAC in the context of the Agenda for Peace.

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Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali will convene the Fourth Coordination Meeting on Humanitarian Assistance for Somalia in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, from 29 November to 1 December. The Meeting will review developments in the humanitarian situation in Somalia since March, when the last such meeting was held, with a view to reaching agreement on priority actions to be undertaken in the immediate future. It will also begin discussion of long-term development planning.

The meeting will be chaired by the Emergency Relief Coordinator and Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Jan Eliasson, and will be held at the headquarters of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA). Participants will include representatives of donor Governments and of neighbouring countries, Somalis from all regions, and representatives of United Nations agencies, international non-governmental organizations and regional organizations.

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The General Assembly, acting without a vote, this morning approved the Secretary-General's recommendation to extend the appointment of Sadako Ogata of Japan as United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees for a five-year term, beginning on 1 January 1994 and ending on 31 December 1998.

Mrs. Ogata was appointed High Commissioner for Refugees in January 1991, the first woman ever to have held the post.

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The suspended peace talks on the future of Bosnia and Herzegovina are unlikely to resume while the present outbreak of fighting continues in the country, according to the Co-Chairmen of the International Conference on the Former Yugoslavia, Lord Owen, the European Community's Envoy. Addressing a press conference in Geneva today, he said that it looked as though a decision had been made to sit out the winter and restart the war in the spring. "There is no sign at the moment that any side is doing anything other than preserve their interests -- and will do so at the expense of their citizens," he stated.

Lord Owen warned that without a negotiated settlement of the conflict, thousands of people were likely to lose their lives this winter. "We are heading for a very nasty humanitarian disaster this winter, and the question is not if, but when," he said, and added that United Nations and other humanitarian workers were taking unacceptable risks to deliver relief supplies.

He reported that Co-Chairman Thorvald Stoltenberg, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the former Yugoslavia, was seeking guarantees from the three parties to the conflict, that any members of their military forces who attacked United Nations or other relief convoys would be apprehended and dealt with. "We want to be convinced that their military are informed at every level, right down through their command structure, that targeting the United Nations or the non-governmental organizations involved in the humanitarian effort is a criminal act which will be punished," he said.

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The General Committee of the General Assembly this morning recommended the inclusion in the Assembly's agenda of an item on "the necessity of adopting effective measures for the promotion and protection of the rights of children throughout the world who are victims of especially difficult circumstances, including armed conflicts". It would be allocated to the Third Committee (Social, Humanitarian and Cultural).

The representative of Cuba, Juan Antonio Fernandez Palacios, introduced the proposed item, in his capacity as Chairman of the Latin American and Caribbean Group. He said 200,000 children died weekly from malnutrition and curable diseases, while nearly 20 million were physically disabled, confined in refugee camps or homeless as a result of wars. It was difficult to justify the Assembly failure to address the problem directly, he said.

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